United Nations A/S-28/PV.1

General Assembly
Twenty-eighth special session

Official Records

1st meeting
Monday, 24 January 2005, 10 a.m.
New York

Temporary President: Mr. Dangue Réwaka ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of the Gabonese Republic

The Temporary President (*spoke in French*): I declare open the twenty-eighth special session of the General Assembly to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President (*spoke in French*): I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-28/2)

The Temporary President (*spoke in French*): I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-28/2, concerning Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in this document?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the special session of the General Assembly

The Temporary President (*spoke in French*): Further to rule 28 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, and in accordance with precedent, it is proposed that the Credentials Committee of the twenty-eighth special session consist of the same members as that of the fifty-ninth regular session of the Assembly.

If there is no objection, I shall consider the Credentials Committee constituted accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Temporary President (*spoke in French*): I should like now to turn to the matter of the credentials of representatives to the twenty-eighth special session of the General Assembly.

As the Assembly is aware, this special session will probably conclude its work this afternoon. In the light of the short duration of the special session, and the concurrence of the members of the Credentials Committee having been obtained, it would be advisable that the special session decide, on an exceptional basis, to accept the credentials approved for the fifty-ninth

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

05-21636 (E)

session for purposes of this special session. This would be without prejudice to the right of Member States to submit separate credentials and would not set a precedent for future sessions.

If I hear no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to accept the credentials approved for the fifty-ninth session for purposes of the special session on an exceptional basis and without setting a precedent?

It was so decided.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President

The Temporary President (*spoke in French*): It has been proposed that the President of the fifty-ninth regular session, His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping of the Gabonese Republic, be elected by acclamation as President of the twenty-eighth special session.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to elect Mr. Jean Ping President of the General Assembly at its twenty-eighth special session by acclamation?

It was so decided.

The Temporary President (*spoke in French*): I extend my sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping and invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Jean Ping took the Chair.

Statement by Mr. Jean Ping, President of the General Assembly at its twenty-eighth special session

The President (*spoke in French*): Sixty years ago, at the conclusion of the appalling Second World War, which claimed more than 100 million victims, the terrified world learned of the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps.

Today, we meet to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation by the allied forces of those odious death camps, where millions of human beings — Jews and other innocent victims — were despicably murdered by reason of their ethnic origins, religious beliefs, ideas or political commitments.

Our Assembly therefore welcomes the holding today, 24 January 2005, of a special session that is both historic and symbolic. It is historic because it marks the very first time that the General Assembly has held a special session to commemorate an event. It is symbolic because, through this session, the international community can finally exorcise, together, the tragedy of the Holocaust and, further, express its firm will to condemn tyranny and barbarism to eternal failure, wherever they may arise.

I should like to commend the initiative of the Member States that called for the convening of this twenty-eighth special session.

I pay a solemn tribute to the survivors of the Holocaust, among whom is Nobel Prize laureate Elie Wiesel, as well as to the courageous veterans of the allied forces of the Second World War, including Mr. Brian Urquhart, former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. They do us the great honour of attending today in this house of nations and the peoples of the world.

They are the precious witnesses to that bleak page in the history of humankind, from which, sadly, we have not always been able to learn our due lessons. Suffice it to recall all the instances of genocide, crimes against humanity and other mass violations of human rights that have occurred since 1945 on the five continents. Above all, they are the living symbols of the very foundations of the United Nations, built on the ashes of horror and tyranny to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Their presence therefore honours us in numerous ways.

There could be no more timely moment to hold this session, which has been convened just as our Organization is engaged in an intensive reform process designed to prepare us better to cope with the myriad challenges and threats to collective security confronting our world today. It is therefore our moral obligation to act unconditionally to preserve what has been called the "duty of memory" regarding one of the most appalling crimes in the history of humankind.

However, while the duty of memory is an indispensable bastion against the temptation to forget, it must also carry us towards the future. This special session also provides us with an opportunity once again to state loud and clear "Never again!" and to reaffirm our dedication to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Our world and our consciences must never again accommodate the arbitrary will that indiscriminately snuffs out innocent lives because of their differences. Because we live in a world that is richer for our respective differences, and because the inalienable right to life is one of the universal values on which our humanity is based, the duty of memory must also go hand in hand with the duty of solidarity.

It is in that respect that I associate myself with the forceful and eloquent statement of Mr. Elie Wiesel that we do not suffer alone, but that we always suffer with those who suffer because of our suffering. May our legitimate dedication to our respective identities always draw sustenance from our shared humanity.

I call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan.

Statement by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General: The date for this session was chosen to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. But, as Members know, there were many other camps, which fell one by one to the allied forces in the winter and spring of 1945.

Only gradually did the world come to know the full dimensions of the evil that those camps contained. The discovery was fresh in the minds of the representatives at San Francisco when this Organization was founded. The United Nations must never forget that it was created as a response to the evil of Naziism or that the horror of the Holocaust helped to shape its mission. That response is enshrined in our Charter and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The camps were not mere "concentration camps". Let us not use the euphemism of those who built them. Their purpose was not to concentrate a group in one place so as to keep an eye on them. It was to exterminate an entire people.

There were other victims, too. The Roma, or Gypsies, were treated with the same utter disregard for their humanity as the Jews. Nearly a quarter of the one million Roma living in Europe were killed. Poles and other Slavs, Soviet prisoners of war, and mentally or physically handicapped people were likewise massacred in cold blood. Groups as disparate as Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals, as well as political opponents and many writers and artists, were treated with appalling brutality.

To all these we owe respect, which we can show by making special efforts to protect all communities that are similarly threatened or vulnerable, now and in the future.

But the tragedy of the Jewish people was unique. Two thirds of all Europe's Jews, including one and a half million children, were murdered. An entire civilization, which had contributed far beyond its numbers to the cultural and intellectual riches of Europe and the world, was uprooted, destroyed and laid waste.

In a moment, we will have the honour of hearing from one of the survivors, my dear friend Elie Wiesel. As Elie has written, "not all victims were Jews, but all Jews were victims". It is fitting, therefore, that the first State to speak today will be the State of Israel — which rose, like the United Nations itself, from the ashes of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust came as the climax of a long, disgraceful history of anti-Semitic persecution, pogroms, institutional discrimination and other degradation. The purveyors of hatred were not always, and may not be in the future, only marginalized extremists.

How could such evil happen in a cultured and highly sophisticated nation-State, in the heart of Europe, whose artists and thinkers had given the world so much? Truly it has been said: "all that is needed for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing".

There were good men — and women — who did do something: Germans like Gertrud Luckner and Oskar Schindler; foreigners like Meip Geis, Chiune Sugihara, Selahattin Ülkümen and Raoul Wallenberg. But not enough. Not nearly enough.

Such an evil must never be allowed to happen again. We must be on the lookout for any revival of anti-Semitism, and ready to act against the new forms of it that are happening today. That obligation binds us not only to the Jewish people, but to all others that have been, or may be, threatened with a similar fate. We must be vigilant against all ideologies based on hatred and exclusion, whenever and wherever they may appear.

On occasions such as this, rhetoric comes easily. We rightly say, "Never again". But action is much harder. Since the Holocaust the world has, to its shame, failed more than once to prevent or halt genocide —

for instance, in Cambodia, in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia.

Even today, we see many horrific examples of inhumanity around the world. To decide which deserves priority, or precisely what action will be effective in protecting victims and giving them a secure future, is not simple. It is easy to say that "something must be done". To say exactly what, when and how — and to do it — is much more difficult. But what we must not do is deny what is happening, or remain indifferent, as so many did when the Nazi factories of death were doing their ghastly work.

Terrible things are happening today in Darfur, Sudan. Tomorrow, I expect to receive the report of the international commission of inquiry, which I established at the request of the Security Council. That report will determine whether or not acts of genocide have occurred in Darfur. But also, and no less important, it will identify the gross violations of international humanitarian law and human rights which undoubtedly have occurred. The Security Council, once it has that report in its hands, will have to decide what action to take, with a view to ensuring that the perpetrators are held accountable. It is a very solemn responsibility.

Today is a day to honour the victims of the Holocaust — to whom, alas, no reparation can ever be made, at least in this world.

It is a day to honour our founders — the allied nations whose troops fought and died to defeat Naziism. Those troops are represented here today by veteran liberators of the camps, including my dear friend and colleague Sir Brian Urquhart.

It is a day to honour the people who risked, and sometimes sacrificed, their own lives to save fellow human beings. Their examples redeem our humanity and must inspire our conduct.

It is a day to honour the survivors, who heroically thwarted the designs of their oppressors, bringing to the world and to the Jewish people a message of hope. As time passes, their numbers dwindle. It falls to us, the successor generations, to lift high the torch of remembrance and to live our lives by its light.

It is, above all, a day to remember not only the victims of past horrors, whom the world abandoned, but also the potential victims of present and future ones — a day to look them in the eye and say: "You, at least, we must not fail".

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Organization of the session

The President (*spoke in French*): In order to expedite the work of the twenty-eighth special session, and in accordance with precedents, it is proposed that the Vice-Presidents of the twenty-eighth special session shall be the same as those of the fifty-ninth regular session of the General Assembly.

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): Likewise, it is proposed that the Chairmen of the Main Committees of the fifty-ninth regular session shall serve in the same capacity at the twenty-eighth special session.

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): The General Committee of the twenty-eighth special session of the General Assembly is thus fully constituted.

I should like to draw the attention of representatives to a matter concerning the participation of the Holy See, in its capacity as an Observer State, and Palestine, in its capacity as observer, in the work of the General Assembly. The observer of the Holy See will participate in the work of the twenty-eighth special session in accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/314 of 1 July 2004, with no further need for a precursory explanation prior to his intervention. The observer of Palestine will participate in the work of the twenty-eighth special session in accordance with resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988 and resolution 52/250 of 7 July 1998, with no further need for a precursory explanation before he takes the floor.

I should now like to consult members on the matter of two additional speakers at the special session.

It has been proposed that the General Assembly hear, before the debate, a statement by a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps and one by a veteran of the Allied Forces that liberated the concentration camps.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to hear a statement before the debate by a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, Mr. Elie Wiesel, and a statement by an ex-serviceman of the Allied Forces, Mr. Brian Urquhart, a former Under-Secretary-General?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should now like to seek the cooperation of representatives on the length of statements. Given the short duration of the special session, and in order to ensure that all the speakers on the list can be heard, it would be desirable for representatives to keep their statements in the debate as brief as possible — preferably not exceeding 10 minutes.

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda

The President (*spoke in French*): The provisional agenda of the twenty-eighth special session of the General Assembly is contained in document A/S-28/1. In order to expedite its work, the Assembly may wish to consider the provisional agenda directly in plenary meeting without referring it to the General Committee.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to this procedure?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to adopt the provisional agenda as it appears in document A/S-28/1?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the decision taken earlier, I give the floor to Mr. Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate.

Mr. Wiesel: The man who stands before you this morning feels deeply privileged. A teacher and writer, he speaks and writes as a witness to a crime committed in the heart of European Christendom and civilization by a brutal, dictatorial regime — a crime of unprecedented cruelty, in which all segments of Government participated. Indeed, this session is extraordinary. I imagine you know what it would have meant to many of us in those years to realize that the world listens. At that time, those who were there felt tortured, murdered, not only by the enemy, but also by what we considered to be the silence and indifference of the world. Now, 60 years later, the world at least tries to listen and remember.

When speaking about that era of darkness, the witness encounters difficulties. His words become obstacles, rather than vehicles. He writes not with words, but against words — for there are no words to describe what the victims felt when death was the norm and life a miracle. Still, whether you know it or not, friends, his memory is part of yours.

I speak as the son of an ancient people, the only people of antiquity to have survived antiquity — the Jewish people — who, throughout much of their history, endured exile and oppression, yet have never given up hope of redemption. As a young adolescent, he saw what no human being should have to see — the triumph of political fanaticism and ideological hatred of those who are different. He saw multitudes of human beings humiliated, isolated, tormented, tortured and murdered. They were overwhelmingly Jews, and there were others. And those who committed those crimes were not vulgar, underworld thugs, but men with high Government, academic, industrial and medical positions in Germany. In recent years we must say that that nation has become a true democracy. But the question remains open: in those dark years, what motivated so many brilliant and committed public servants to invent such horrors? In spite of being the most documented tragedy in the annals of history, by its scope and magnitude, by its sheer weight of numbers, by the impact of so much humiliation and agony and pain, Auschwitz still defies language and understanding.

May I evoke those times for a minute: babies used as target practice by the SS; adolescents condemned never to grow old; parents watching their children thrown into burning pits; immense solitude engulfing an entire people; infinite despair haunting our days and our dreams — even 60 years later.

When did what we saw — poorly called the Holocaust — begin? In 1938, during Kristallnacht? In 1939, perhaps, when a German ship, the Saint Louis, with more than 1,000 German Jewish refugees aboard — men, women and children — was turned back from America's shores? Was it when the first ghettos were established in Warsaw and Lodz? Or was it when the first massacres occurred in Russian occupied territories or in Babi Yar?

We still ask: What was Auschwitz? Was it an experiment of madness that had the dimensions of the world and its Creator? Was it an end or a beginning? Was it an apocalyptic consequence of centuries-old bigotry and hatred? Or was it a final convulsion of demonic forces in human nature? A creation parallel to God's? A world with its own antinomian United Nations? Of people of different nationalities, traditions, cultures, socio-economic status, speaking many languages, clinging to a variety of faiths and memories? They were grown-ups or young, but inside that world there were no children and there were no grandparents. They had already perished.

As members heard my friend Kofi Annan quote me, not all victims were Jewish, but all Jews were victims. For the first time in recorded history, to be became a crime. Their birth became their death sentence. Correction: Jewish children were condemned to die even before they were born. What the enemy sought to attain was to put an end to Jewish history. What he wanted was a new world implacably, irrevocably devoid of Jews. Hence, Auschwitz, Ponar, Treblinka, Belzec, Chelmno and Sobibor — dark factories of death, just for death. They were built to create death, erected for the Final Solution. Killers came there to kill and victims to die.

Yes, a million and a half children. And what the enemy did to itself by killing those children is clear. How many among them could have been future Nobel Prize winners? One of them could have invented a real remedy for cancer or other diseases. One might have written a great poem of such inspiration, of such strength and weight to move the nations of the world to give up — really give up — on organized violence and war.

What was Auschwitz? It was an executioner's ideal of a kingdom of absolute evil and malediction to which were sent princes and beggars, philosophers and theologians, politicians and artists; a place where to lose a piece of bread meant losing life and where a smile from a friend meant another day of promise. At the time, the witness tried to understand — he still does not — how such calculated evil, such bottomless and pointless cruelty were possible. Had creation gone mad? Had God covered his face? A religious person cannot conceive of Auschwitz either with or without God.

But what about men? How could intelligent, educated men or simply law-abiding citizens, ordinary men, fire machine guns at hundreds of children every day, and at their parents and grandparents, and in the evening enjoy a cadence by Schiller, a partita by Bach?

Turning point or watershed, that tremendous catastrophe, which has traumatized history, has forever changed men's perception of responsibility towards other human beings. And the sad, terrible fact is, had the Western nations intervened when Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia and Austria; had America accepted more refugees from Europe; had Britain allowed more Jews into Palestine, now Israel, their ancestral land; had the allies bombed the railway lines leading to Birkenau at the time the Hungarian Jews were there, being killed at a rate of 10,000 a day, our tragedy might have been avoided and its scope surely diminished.

This shameful indifference we must remember, just as we must remember to thank the few heroic individuals who, like Raoul Wallenberg, the people of Le Chambord in France and some others, though so few, risked their lives to save Jews. We shall always remember the armies that liberated Europe, the sacrifices they made, and the soldiers who liberated the death camps — the Americans in Buchenwald, the Russians in Auschwitz and the British and Canadians in Belsen. But for many victims, they all came too late. That, also, we must remember. When the American Third Army liberated Buchenwald, there was no joy in our heart, only pain. We did not sing. We did not celebrate. We had just enough strength to recite the *Kaddish* — the prayer for the dead.

And now, my friends, sixty years later, we may ask: "Why so late?" But still, I humbly and respectfully urge the diplomats here, who represent the entire world community, to listen to the words of witnesses. Like Jeremiah and Job in the Bible, we could have cried and cursed the days dominated by injustice and violence; we could have chosen vengeance. We did not. We could have chosen hatred. We did not. Hatred is degrading and vengeance demeaning. They are diseases. Their history is dominated by death. The Jewish witness that I am speaks of my people's suffering as a warning. He sounds the alarms to prevent these tragedies from being done to others. And yes, I am convinced that, if the world had listened to those of us who tried to speak — and nobody listened — we may have prevented Darfur, Cambodia, Bosnia and, naturally, Rwanda.

We know that, for the dead, it is too late. For them, abandoned by God and betrayed by humanity,

victory did come much too late. But it is not too late for today's children – ours and yours. It is for their sake alone that we bear witness. It is for their sake that we are duty-bound to denounce anti-Semitism and its horrors and ugliness, racism and its stupidity, and religious or ethnic hatred and its dangers. Those who today preach the practice and practise the cult of death; those who use suicide terrorism, the scourge of the new century, must be tried and condemned for crimes against humanity. Suffering confers no privileges. It is what one does with suffering that matters. Yes, the past is in the present, but the future is still in our hands — yours as well as mine.

Those who survived Auschwitz advocate hope, not despair; generosity, not rancour or bitterness; gratitude, not violence. We must be engaged. We must reject indifference as an option. Indifference always helps the aggressor, never his victims. And what is memory if not a noble and necessary response to and against indifference?

So for today, many of us are grateful to the United Nations, for we see this as a historic day. We are grateful to representatives for listening, for being here and for acting. But as a teacher I always believe in questions, and the question is: Will the world ever learn?

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the decision taken earlier, I now give the floor to Mr. Brian Urquhart, veteran of the Allied Forces and former Under-Secretary-General.

Mr. Urquhart: In commemorating the liberation of the worst of all the Nazi concentration camps, Auschwitz, we recall here in the United Nations General Assembly the unimaginable crime that was committed in Europe over a period of more than a decade only 60 years ago, a crime just evoked as only he, Elie Wiesel, could evoke it.

In April 1945, I was one of the first Allied soldiers to reach the Bergen-Belsen camp. Belsen had been set up relatively late in the war to receive, among other victims, survivors of camps in the east, including Auschwitz, which might be overrun by the Soviet Army.

I used the word unimaginable because the scene we came upon in Belsen was truly unimaginable. Many of us had long been horrified by the Nazi anti-Semitism and Nazi persecution of the Jews. In fact, I myself, from 1933 on, was vividly aware of it because the school that my mother and her sisters ran in the west of England took in many Jewish girls escaping from Germany and, later, from Austria. And, of course, I knew a number of Jewish refugees when I was at Oxford before the war.

But until one saw the horrific reality, it was impossible to imagine the vast racial annihilation system of which Belsen was just one small part, a system for the slow murder of millions of innocent human beings, for the deliberate desecration of millions of human souls in deliberately disgusting and degrading conditions — and all in the name of a perverted and lunatic ideology.

At Belsen, the dead and dying were everywhere. Cholera, typhus, small pox, measles, dysentery were rife, not to mention general starvation. Two walls of the children's playground — if you could call it that — consisted of neatly packed human corpses. That is one of the problems of preventing genocide: for ordinary people, it is simply unimaginable until it actually happens and they can see it for themselves. And, of course, by that time, it is too late to prevent it.

Even after the daily horrors of six years of world war, the Nazi concentration camps sent a shock wave around the world. They told the world that peace — that longed-for objective — was not enough. They told the world that it was still possible, even in Europe, for a Government or a controlling group, under the spell of bigotry or ideology, to kill millions of innocent people. They told the world that unpredictable explosions of man's inhumanity to man demanded a universally agreed standard for human rights.

That standard was drawn up surprisingly quickly under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt, and it was adopted in 1948 here in the General Assembly as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But after nearly 60 years, what still eludes us is a reliable method of protecting and enforcing those rights in every part of the world. As the Secretary-General has reminded us, the world and the United Nations failed on at least three occasions since 1948 to prevent a major genocide, and at this very moment a genocide may be occurring in Darfur.

Recently, more stringent proposals to prevent such gross abuses of human rights have been put forward by the Secretary-General and others. This commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz serves to remind Governments and all the many people concerned how vitally important this objective is. This commemoration serves to recall what human beings,

driven by hatred or fear or some perverted ideology, are, against all rational belief, still capable of doing to one another.

The memory of those millions of innocent victims of the Nazi camps and of so many others since that time is the call to action — a plea from beyond the grave of "never again".

Agenda item 7

Commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel, His Excellency Mr. Silvan Shalom, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel.

Mr. Shalom (Israel): Sixty years ago, Allied soldiers arrived at the gates of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Nothing could prepare them for what they would witness there and at the other camps they liberated: the stench of the bodies, the piles of clothes, of teeth, of children's shoes. But in the accounts of the liberators, more than the smell, even more than the piles of bodies, the story of the horror was told in the faces of the survivors.

The account of Harold Herbst, an American liberator in Buchenwald, is typical of many:

> "As I walked through the barracks ... I heard a voice, and I turned around, and I saw a living skeleton talk to me. He said, 'Hey! Thank God you've come!' And that was a funny feeling. Did you ever talk to a skeleton that talked back? And that's what I was doing. And later on, I saw mounds of these living skeletons that the Germans left behind them."

Thousands of years ago, the prophet Ezekiel had a similar vision. In one of the most famous passages of the Bible, the prophet describes how he came to a valley full of bones. The bones, says Ezekiel, are the House of Israel. And the bones are dry, and their hope is lost. Faced with this scene, he asks the question: Shall these bones live? Shall these bones live? Ezekiel asked the question that every liberator of the camps asked himself: Can any hope or humanity emerge from such horror? Shall these bones live?

Here with me today are those who have given life to dry bones, both survivors and liberators. They are men like Dov Shilansky, who fought in the ghetto and later became speaker of Israel's parliament, the Knesset; Yossi Paled, who, after being evacuated from the terrors of the Nazis, eventually became a Major-General in the Israel Defence Forces to protect his people from the horrors of another calamity; and David Grinstein, who survived the labour camps and now heads an organization for restitution for the forced labourers under Nazi rule; and women like Gila Almagor, today the first lady of the Israeli stage and screen, who has translated her experiences as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor into art that has touched millions.

When we see what the survivors have managed to create and build and contribute to humanity — families, careers, literature, music, even countries — we can only marvel at their strength and courage. At the same time, when we see what the survivors have given to humankind, we can only begin to appreciate what might have been given to the world by the millions who did not survive. We mourn their loss to this day. Every fibre of our people feels their absence. Every family knows the pain, including my own: my wife's grandparents and seven of their eight children were taken and killed.

Israel and the Jewish people owe a debt to the liberators of the death camps, and so does all of humankind. In the face of unspeakable evil, those liberators, from many of the nations represented here today, showed the human capacity for good. In the face of overwhelming indifference to the suffering of others, they showed compassion; and in the face of cowardice, they showed bravery and resolve.

We recognize, too, the courage and humanity of the "righteous among the nations", who refused to look away — people such as Raoul Wallenberg, who saved thousands of Jewish lives and whose niece, Nane, is here with us today. Those heroes helped our dry bones live again.

The dry bones have lived again, not only in the lives of the survivors, but also in two entities established on the ashes of the Holocaust: the United Nations and the modern State of Israel.

The tragedy of the Holocaust was a major impetus in the re-establishment of the Jewish people's home, in its ancient land. As Israel declared in its Declaration of Independence:

> "The ... Holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the urgency of the re-establishment of the Jewish State, which would solve the problem of Jewish homelessness by opening the gates to all Jews and lifting the Jewish people to equality in the family of nations."

And indeed, since its establishment, Israel has provided a haven for Jews facing persecution anywhere in the world. At the same time, it has built a society based on the values of democracy and freedom for all its citizens, where Jewish life and culture and literature and religion and learning — all those things which the Nazis sought to destroy — can flourish and thrive. The fact that so many survivors came and played their part in the building of the State of Israel was itself a remarkable fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy. As the prophet said:

> "Thus says the Lord: Behold, O my people, I will take you from the graves. I will put my spirit in you, and you shall live in your own land, in the land of Israel."

If Israel represents one heroic attempt to find a positive response to the atrocities of the Second World War, the United Nations represents another. The very first clauses of the United Nations Charter bear witness to the understanding of the founders that the new international Organization must serve as the world's answer to evil — that it comes "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights" and "the dignity and worth of the human person".

By gathering here today in this Hall — which has so often vilified Israel — in this historic special session, we honour the victims, we pay respect to the survivors and we pay tribute to the liberators. We gather here today for those who remember, for those who have forgotten and for those who do not know. But we also gather to remember that the Charter of the United Nations, like Israel's Declaration of Independence, is written in the blood of the victims of the Holocaust. And we gather here today to recommit ourselves to the noble principles on which the Organization was founded.

Such an affirmation is needed today more than ever. The past decade has witnessed a chilling increase in attempts to deny the very fact of the Holocaust. Unbelievable as it seems, there are those who would delete from history 6 million murders. Could anything be worse than to systematically destroy a people; to take the proud Jewish citizens of Vienna, Frankfurt and Vilna, and even Tunisia and Libya; to burn their holy books; to steal their dignity, their hair, their teeth; to turn them into numbers, into soap, into the ashes of Treblinka and Dachau?

The answer is, yes, there is something worse: to do all this and then deny it; to do all this and then take from the victims — and from their children and grandchildren — the legitimacy of their grief. To deny the Holocaust is not only to desecrate the victims and abuse the survivors; it is also to deprive the world of its lessons — lessons which are as crucial today as they were 60 years ago. Those lessons are crucial today for three urgent reasons.

The first reason is that today, once again, the plague of anti-Semitism is raising its head. Who could have imagined that, less than 60 years after Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, the Jewish people and Israel would be the targets of anti-Semitic attacks, even in the countries that witnessed the Nazi atrocities? Yet that is exactly what is happening. The Holocaust teaches us that, while Jews may be the first to suffer from anti-Semitism's destructive hate, they have rarely been the last.

The lessons of the Holocaust are crucial today for a second reason: that today, once again, we are witnessing the same process of delegitimization and dehumanization, directed against Jews and other minorities, that paved the way to destruction. Let us not forget: the brutal extermination of a people began not with guns or tanks, but with words, systematically portraying the Jews — the others — as less than legitimate, less than human. Let us not forget that fact when we find current newspapers and schoolbooks borrowing caricatures and themes from the Nazi paper *Der Stürmer* to portray Jews and Israelis.

And finally, those lessons are crucial today because, once again, we are witnessing a violent assault on the fundamental principle of the sanctity of human life. Perhaps the greatest single idea that the Bible has given to humanity is the simple truth that every man, woman and child is created in the divine image and so is of infinite value. For the Nazis, the value of a man was finite, even pitiful. How much work could he do? How much hair did she have? How many gold teeth?

For the Nazis, the destruction of one human being, or of 100, 1,000, 6 million, was of no consequence. It was just a means to an evil end. Today again, we are pitted against the forces of evil, those for whom human life — be it the civilians they target, or their own youth, whom they use as weapons — are of no value, nothing but a means to an end.

Our sages teach us that, "He who takes a single life, it is as if he has taken an entire world". No human life is less than a world. No ideology, no political agenda can justify or excuse the deliberate taking of an innocent life.

For 6 million Jews, the State of Israel came too late. For them, and for countless others, the United Nations also came too late. But it is not too late to renew our commitment to the purposes for which the United Nations was founded. It is not too late to work towards an international community that will reflect those values fully; that will be uncompromising in combating intolerance against people of all faiths and ethnicities; that will reject moral equivalence; and that will call evil by its name.

We will never know whether, if the United Nations had existed then, the Holocaust could have been prevented. But this special session today confirms the need for the United Nations, as well as for each individual Member State, to rededicate ourselves to ensuring that it never happens again.

In that context, I wish to commend the Secretary-General for his moral voice and his leadership in bringing this special session to fruition, and my colleague Foreign Ministers for their presence here today. As the number of survivors continues to shrink, we are on the brink of the moment when that terrible event will change from a memory to history. Let all of us gathered here pledge never to forget the victims, never to abandon the survivors, and never to allow such an event to be repeated — ever.

As the Foreign Minister of Israel, the sovereign State of the Jewish people, I stand before you, to swear, in the name of the victims, the survivors, and all the Jewish people — never again.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on His Excellency Mr. Bronislaw Geremek, M.P., Special Representative of the President of Poland.

Mr. Geremek (Poland): I am here today as a representative of Poland — the country whose territory during the Nazi occupation was the scene of the Holocaust and of the most horrific crimes in history. It is difficult to speak about the Holocaust, to find adequate words to express our thoughts and feelings.

Our debate has as its subject a certain attack — effective and extremely dramatic in its immediate and long-term consequences — against the ethical code of any democratic civilization, and especially against the commandment that "You shall not kill". The system of Nazi concentration camps, combined with centres for the extermination of selected social and ethnic groups, cost Europe the lives of at least 10 million human beings. In the name of protecting humankind, we must never forget that lesson taught to us by history.

Nazi concentration camps existed in one form or another all over the parts of Europe occupied by the Germans and their allies, in Germany itself and in annexed Austria. However, they left their most dramatic imprint on the occupied countries, and most of all on Poland. That is the reason why our country has a special interest in this matter.

Poland lost a large part of its spiritual and political elite in Nazi concentration camps, along with some 3 million — or 90 per cent — of its Jewish citizens. It was in occupied Poland that Hitler's Germany located Auschwitz — its largest concentration camp and the greatest centre for the annihilation of European Jews and Roma, and a place of killing and suffering for others as well. Camp Auschwitz came to symbolize Nazi crimes.

Though it is Auschwitz that became the symbol of the Holocaust and genocide, other death camps also operated in Polish territory — including Belzec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Majdanek and Chelmno. It must be understood that, even though the camps were located in Polish territory, they were not — contrary to some historical and media rhetoric — Polish camps. The camps were created by Nazi Germany, which was occupying Poland.

If I can introduce a personal note, for me, Auschwitz is my family graveyard; my father was killed there. Furthermore, the expression "Polish camps" is not only misleading, but I daresay that it is also deeply hurtful to the feelings of Poles.

Nazi Germany chose Poland as the place for the massacre of European Jews for two interconnected reasons. First, most of the doomed Jews — from

infants to old men — lived in Central and Eastern Europe. Secondly, the perpetrators hoped to conceal their crime from the world by committing it far from Western Europe. The crime was meant to remain a State secret.

Poland is aware of its special role, stemming from the fact that it has in its care all those places of remembrance, so important to the whole world, of the greatest crime of the second millennium — a remembrance of the people who suffered and died. It is an enormous and profound moral responsibility, a mandate that we are fulfilling in the name of all of Europe and the rest of the world — a mission that we feel is ours.

Our dedication to this special mission is evidenced by the fact that solemn ceremonies will be held at the initiative of the Polish Government at the site of the former camp at Auschwitz to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the camp's liberation by the Soviet Army.

Our country will spare no effort to ensure the lasting preservation of the remnants of the concentration camps and extermination centres located in Poland by the German occupiers, to turn them into places open to the world, where historic reflection and education will take place in a spirit of democracy and tolerance.

It is our duty not only to preserve the memory of what happened, but also to shape the awareness of younger generations in a spirit of tolerance, respect for human rights and sensitivity to any manifestation of discrimination. That goal could be implemented through educational programmes, such as those envisaged at the Centre for Education About Auschwitz and the Holocaust, planned for Ogwigcim, and through the Institute of Peace and Reconciliation, which will study contemporary acts of genocide.

Poland has also developed successful youth-exchange programmes, which are the best form of active dialogue. Stereotypes held by the present generation are combated by confronting them with personal experience and through people-to-people contact. An example of that is the moving and dramatic annual March of the Living, with the participation of Jewish and Polish youth, organized by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat the name of Majdanek. In Majdanek, the ashes of those who were murdered have been collected in a large concrete urn, which is a monument to the memory of the victims. It bears an inscription that none of the visitors can miss: "Our fate should be a warning to all of you".

That is what we should talk about here today. Those who were put to death, in gas chambers or through starvation or inhuman labour, in Auschwitz and other concentration camps, can never be forgotten. May their fate be a warning when today we witness the hatred, the misery and the extermination of victims in various parts of the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Lukin, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lukin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The event to which today's meeting of the General Assembly is dedicated is of truly unique and historic significance. Sixty years ago, during the final stage of the rout of Hitler's Nazism during the Second World War, the attacking Soviet troops liberated one of the most monstrous death camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau. Those tortured in that camp included Jews and Gypsies — citizens of 17 countries of the world. Since then, and for ever more, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Buchenwald, Dachau and Mauthausen have been enshrined in the memory of humankind as the most evil symbols of the ruthless extermination of millions of totally innocent people. May they forever be remembered, and may they serve as an eternal warning. We bow our heads before the victims of the barbaric extermination that took place in the death camps, and recall with gratitude those who, at the cost of their own lives, fought against Nazism, oppression, racism and aggression.

Unprecedented in its scale and in its losses, the Second World War forced all of civilized humanity, setting aside all differences and opposing views, to close ranks against the lethal danger of Nazi enslavement. The victory won was our joint victory — one which provided a powerful impetus for the solidarity of the international community, one result of which was the creation of the United Nations.

Having paid a terrible price, endured suffering and witnessed the deaths of millions, the peoples of the world realized that there was no alternative to a system of collective security, which was enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Today, we must not forget that attempts to encroach on the democratic

rights of citizens, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, lead directly to the exercise of total, arbitrary will. From there, it is just one step more to the crimes which we recall with horror and revulsion. Our country, with its tragic experience of wilfulness and lawlessness at the time of the Communist dictatorship, will never forget that.

It would be madness to allow ourselves to forget and consign to oblivion the terrible lessons of Nazi aggression and brutality. It is our duty to honour the memory of all those who perished, to prevent even the possibility of the recurrence of a world war and to unite the efforts of the international community once again in countering the new challenges and threats, recognizing and acknowledging, with respect, the central role of the United Nations.

As we recall the terrible years of war, those memories must eternally remind us of the need to resolutely counter efforts to rewrite history, to diverge from existing, clear, historic and moral criteria in assessing fascism, and especially to make heroes of Nazis and their ilk, who are all enemies of democracy and of the legal foundations of society.

Recently, in a number of European States that suffered terribly as a result of Nazi crimes, rallies have been taking place in support of those who fought during the Second World War on the side of Hitler's Germany in SS units. The intention behind such gatherings to publicly recognize the former henchmen of fascism is, in fact, tantamount to incitement to a review of the decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal, which designated all participants in SS units as war criminals. Any other assessment of the acts that they perpetrated during the Second World War would be an insult to the memory of the millions of victims of Naziism.

The need to consolidate the efforts of the international community to resist attempts to rehabilitate and idealize Naziism and other forms of militant racism and totalitarianism is unquestioned. To that end, we would like to call once again on all countries to implement the relevant international agreements, in particular the resolution adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on 16 April 2004 on the inadmissibility of certain practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Saving the treasures of the world's intellectual history and historic monuments from attempts by extremists to destroy them continues to be an objective of great relevance. Failure to act in this regard, or indifference to the desecration of monuments to the heroes and victims of the Second World War, can only play into the hands of supporters of extremist nationalist ideologies. We are obliged to note with regret that such phenomena as anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia have by no means disappeared from our life today. Of particular concern is the widespread nature of this phenomenon among the younger generation in a number of countries. It is no secret that many anti-Semitic actions, including the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, have been provoked by young radical factions, including skinheads.

In our country recently, as a result of pressure from public opinion and human rights defenders, the courts have handed down a number of harsh sentences to individuals guilty of such acts. We believe that the fight against extremism, anti-Semitism and the ideology of racial supremacy, can be conducted only through the joint efforts of the entire international community.

This special session is one of the most important links in the chain of solemn events devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of the great victory over fascism. As is well known, that military defeat was one to which our country made a decisive contribution. On 22 November 2004, on the initiative of Russia and a group of countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, with which other countries associated themselves, the General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution proclaiming 8 and 9 May as days of remembrance and recollection. Henceforth those dates will be commemorated annually as a tribute and a sign of respect to all of the victims of the Great War.

The historic significance of the victory in the Second World War is indivisible from that irreplaceable mission which for six decades now has been carried out by the United Nations. The very creation of this world Organization was above all the result of the efforts of the anti-Hitlerite coalition and would have been unthinkable without its victory over fascism.

Today's threats and challenges, as well as the experience of history which preceded it, clearly indicate that there is no alternative to a universal

intensification of peacekeeping and to the strengthening of the anti-terrorist potential of the United Nations, as well as the increased effectiveness of its activities as the central coordinating mechanism for inter-State relations and the basis for the formation of a new, safer and more just world order, in which international law reigns supreme, on the basis of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Russia is dedicated to those objectives and is ready for constructive cooperation in that area with all interested States.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize once again that the historic date to which the present special session of the General Assembly is dedicated is seen in Russia as a tribute to the millions of victims of the Nazi nightmare. That Auschwitz which was liberated and annihilated 60 years ago must never be recreated in any single corner of the globe.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of the United States of America. His Excellency Mr. Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense.

Mr. Wolfowitz (United States of America): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this twenty-eighth special session, and I wish also to thank those Member States that supported the request for the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for the eloquent statement he made today and for his encouragement of this initiative. I wish also to thank Sir Bryan Urquhart for his service in the war and his witness here today. Our special gratitude goes to Elie Wiesel not only for his inspiring words here today, but for all he has taught us with his life. Elie Wiesel has taught us that in extreme situations when human lives and dignity are at stake, neutrality is a sin. It helps the killers, he says, not the victims.

Elie Wiesel teaches us that we must speak about unspeakable deeds, so that they will be neither forgotten nor repeated. Most of all, he offers personal witness that in the face of the most horrific oppression, there is always hope that the goodness of the human spirit will prevail.

That is the larger meaning of why we have gathered here today. We are here to reflect, in the magnitude of the occasion, how totalitarian evil claimed millions of precious lives. But, just as important, the member nations attending today are affirming their rejection of such evil and making a statement of hope for a more civilized future, a hope that "never again" will the world look the other way in the face of such evil.

For, if there is one thing the world has learned, it is that peaceful nations cannot close their eyes or sit idly by in the face of genocide. It took a war, the most terrible war in history, to end the horrors that we remember today. It was a war that Winston Churchill called "the unnecessary war", because he believed that a firm and concerted policy by the peaceful nations of the world could have stopped Hitler early on. But it was a war that became necessary to save the world from what he correctly called "the abyss of a new dark age, made more sinister ... by the lights of a perverted science."

This truth we also know — that war, even a just and noble war, is horrible for everyone it touches. War is not something Americans seek, nor something we will ever grow to like. Throughout our history, we have waged it reluctantly, but we have pursued it as a duty when it was necessary.

Our own Civil War was one of the bloodiest the world had known up to its time. It, too, was fought to end a great evil. As that war was nearing its bloody close, President Abraham Lincoln spoke to the nation hoping that the war would end soon, but saying that it would continue if necessary until, as he put it, "every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword".

Two months after the Battle of Antietam, where the number of American dead was four times the number that fell on the beaches of Normandy, President Lincoln told members of the United States Congress that those who hold the power and bear the responsibility could not escape the burden of history. He said, "We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth."

Americans have fought often to liberate others from slavery and tyranny in order to protect our own freedom. Cemeteries from France to North Africa, with their rows of Christian crosses and Stars of David, attest to that truth.

When Americans have taken up arms, it has been believing that, in the end, it is never just about us

alone, knowing that woven into our liberty is a mantle of responsibility, knowing that the whole world benefits when people are free to realize their dreams and develop their talents.

Today, we remember the people who fell victim to tyranny because of their political views, their ethnic heritage or their religion, in places where human slaughter was perfected as an efficient and systematic industry of State. We can only imagine how different our lives would be had those millions of lost souls had the chance to live out their dreams.

Today, we also pay tribute to all the soldiers of many Allied nations who participated in the liberation of the Nazi death camps for their courage and sacrifice and for the care they provided to the survivors.

We are proud of the role of our own American soldiers, the so-called "young old men" 19 and 20 years of age, who fought through their own horrors at Anzio and Normandy and Bastogne and who thought that a world of evil held no more surprises for them, but who were astonished to the depth of their souls when they confronted the human ruins of Nazi tyranny in the spring of 1945.

Just one week before the end of the war in Europe, the United States Seventh Army reached Dachau. Lieutenant Colonel Walther Fellenz described what he saw as the 42nd Infantry Division neared the main gate of that concentration camp. It was "a mass of cheering, half-mad men, women and children ... their liberators had come! The noise was beyond comprehension", he said. "Our hearts wept as we saw the tears of happiness fall from their cheeks."

Sensing the approach of victory, General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, was unprepared for what greeted him at the camp at Ohrdruf. As he walked past thousands of corpses in shallow graves and saw the instruments of torture used by the SS, he was moved to anger and to action.

He cabled Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall words which are now engraved at the entrance of the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington: "The things I saw", Eisenhower wrote, "beggar description ... the visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering". He insisted on looking into one particular room that contained piles of skeletal, naked men, killed through starvation. "I made the visit deliberately", he said, "in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations to 'propaganda'".

Eisenhower wanted others to see this crime against humanity. So he urged American Congressmen and journalists to go to the camps. He directed that a film record the reality and that it be shown widely to German citizens. He ordered that as many GIs as possible see the camps. American soldiers became what one writer called "reluctant archaeologists of man's most inhuman possibilities".

Jack Hallet, one of the soldiers who liberated Dachau, found that it was difficult to separate the living from the dead. As he looked more closely at a stack of corpses, he noticed that deep within the pile, he could see sets of eyes still blinking.

Dan Evers was in the 286th Combat Engineer Battalion at Dachau. "The gas chamber door was closed", he recalled, "but the ovens were still open. There was a sign in German overhead which said: 'Wash your hands after work'."

Another soldier wrote to his parents, asking them to keep his letter, because "it is my personal memorandum of something I personally want to remember but would like to forget".

From Ebensee, Captain Timothy Brennan of the Third Cavalry wrote to his wife and child: "You cannot imagine that such things exist in a civilized world".

From Mauthausen in Austria, Sergeant Fred Friendly wrote to his mother: "I want you never to forget, or let our disbelieving friends forget, that your flesh and blood saw this. Your son saw this with his own eyes and in doing so aged 10 years."

Beyond the shock and horror, American and Russian and other Allied soldiers who liberated the camps were also witnesses to hope. Tomorrow, you will have the opportunity to hear an American GI tell one such story. Tomorrow, Lieutenant John Withers, of the all-African-American Quartermaster Truck Company 3512, will speak about how he and his soldiers changed the lives of two young boys who were rescued from Dachau.

Yet, as proud as we are of the role our soldiers played in the liberation of the concentration camps, we know that we all arrived too late for most of the victims.

Just last week, a great Polish patriot passed away. During the Second World War, Jan Nowak, who was not Jewish, risked his life to leave Poland to bring news of the Nazi genocide to the West. I was privileged to meet Jan Nowak in his Warsaw apartment just three months ago. He recalled that after the war, when he was able to see the records of his secret meetings with Western officials, there was no mention of what he had told them about Poland's Jews. Nowak put it down to "wartime inconvenience". He was telling truths that people wanted not to know.

And, despite our fervent promises never to forget, we know that there have been far too many occasions in the six decades since the liberation of the concentration camps when the world has ignored inconvenient truths so that it would not have to act, or when it acted too late.

We have agreed today to set aside contemporary political issues in order to reflect on those events of 60 years ago in a spirit of unanimity. But let us do so with a unanimous resolve to give real meaning to those words, "never forget", and with a resolve that, even when we may find it too difficult to act, we at least have an obligation to tell the truth.

Last Thursday, as he began his second term in office, President Bush expressed his belief that our nation's interests cannot be separated from the aspirations of others to be free from tyranny and oppression. He said:

> "America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights and dignity and matchless value ... Across the generations we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government because no one is fit to be a master and no one deserves to be a slave. Advancing these ideals ... is the honourable achievement of our fathers ... and the calling of our time."

Americans remain committed to working with all nations of good will to alleviate the suffering of our time. And we remain hopeful that when generations to come look back on this time, they will see that we were dedicated to fulfilling the pledge that arose from the ashes of man's inhumanity toward man: Never again.

Never again, and never forget. We must keep remembering; we must continue to speak about unspeakable things. So we commend the United Nations for this remembrance of the Holocaust, which befits its significance in human history. In so doing, perhaps we can help avoid such inhumanity and the warfare that marches along with it.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg, His Excellency Mr. Jean Asselborn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, speaking on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Asselborn (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): There are places and events that are never lost in history. They always remain present in the minds of men. Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bergen-Belsen, Treblinka and the other death camps are such emblematic places that will never go away. They remain an ever-open wound in the moral conscience of humankind. That is where the intentional, planned and organized extermination of millions of human beings was carried out in the Nazi death factories. It was there that the experience of humiliation and the negation of humanity found its most absolute expression.

The blunt words of Elie Wiesel say it all: "Killers came there to kill, and victims to die". We shall always remember those men and women, those children — persecuted because of their race or their religion, their political conviction or nationality — victims of barbarity and of hatred. Their suffering was unspeakable and their experience beggars description. All that we are left with is the duty to remember and this vital moral appeal: "Never again!"

However, remembering the victims also presents us with another duty — that of striving to understand the chain of causes and effects, the appalling logic which drove millions of human beings towards a death that, 60 years later, is still beyond our understanding. Only such research into the historical facts will enable us to draw the moral and political lessons from the concentration camp hell in order to prevent it from recurring. As George Santayana reminded us in his famous aphorism, those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. To seek the causes of the Shoah that struck the Jews of Europe in such a merciless and blind fashion, but also the causes of the desire to exterminate, whose victims were still other men and women, is to denounce the ideologies of hatred and exclusion grounded in anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia, which, unfortunately, as we all know, still have their sorry advocates in the present day.

The duty to remember also involves an obligation to educate, particularly the young generations. That means not just a moral duty, but also a civic duty of the highest order, which we cannot shirk.

I am deeply moved at the idea of speaking today in the United Nations on behalf of the European Union on this occasion of the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps. It is an opportunity to show our respect for the countless victims — known or unknown — of those death factories. It is also an opportunity to pay tribute with gratitude to the Allied Forces that 60 years ago put an end to the Nazi nightmare and made it possible for the all-too-few survivors of the camps to be liberated.

It seems particularly fitting that this commemorative meeting should take place at the United Nations, an Organization that arose out of the ashes of war and whose Charter, in its preamble, speaks of the untold suffering of humankind. The Charter proclaims the emergence of a fairer and more peaceful world order based on respect for human rights and international law and organized around international institutions, which we have inherited from the visionaries who met in San Francisco 60 years ago and who created the United Nations, which remains a source of inspiration and hope for all humankind.

Two magnificent texts, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on 9 and 10 December 1948 respectively, express the same vision, deeply imbued with humanism. The European venture was launched along the same lines shortly after the Second World War. Fundamentally, the European project was and remains one of peace, seeking, in the words of the 1951 Treaty of Paris,

> "to substitute for age old rivalries the merging of [States parties'] essential interests; to create, by establishing an economic community, the basis for a broader and deeper community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts; and to lay the foundations for institutions which will give direction to a destiny henceforward shared".

Thus, the United Nations and the European Union, among others, are attempts at drawing lessons from the deeply traumatic experience of the camps and the war.

Those lofty and noble aspirations must be kept alive and adapted to the special demands of our times. That is our responsibility, our duty and our commitment. It is with that in mind that the catchphrase "Never again!", which I invoked earlier, must not be limited to being a mere moral exhortation, however powerful it may be. It must become a constant guide to our conduct in defining and actively enacting policies and measures that we must implement. Thus, memory will become active remembrance in a genuine act of faith in response to the silent but eloquent testimony that we have inherited from the victims of the death camps.

Let us heed the warning of poet Paul Eluard, who reminded us that if the echo of their voices should fade, we shall perish. Let us show that we are worthy of that essential legacy.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on His Excellency Mr. Marcello Pera, Speaker of the Senate of Italy.

Mr. Pera (Italy) At this special session of the General Assembly, we are confronted with many an obligation. The list is long and the burden it imposes on us is heavy.

We have an obligation to tell the truth. The Holocaust is not the product of imagination or propaganda or rhetoric. The Holocaust is a tragic, unique fact of history. Those who deny it, underestimate it or try to revise it are simply committing another crime.

We have an obligation to remember and pay respect to the memory of the millions of human beings who were gassed, tortured, starved, and forced to die in the most humiliating ways.

We have an obligation to understand. How was it possible that Europe, at the peak of its civilization, could commit such a crime? How could Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, collaborationist France and many others become responsible — in different ways and to different extents, but in any case responsible — for such an immense massacre? We cannot attribute such responsibilities to the sudden madness of people. When whole countries go mad, it is because people have been brainwashed with violent ideologies and false myths.

The Holocaust did not come out of nothing. Culture paved the way with such perverse ideas as the will to power, the "superman", conspiracy and race

superiority. Politics provided the arm of legitimacy. The Nazi regime supplied the rest: a carefully masterminded plan aimed at depriving an entire population of its very identity and existence.

We have an obligation to commit ourselves to that fundamental value of the dignity of the person — any human person — which Europe learned from its Judeo-Christian roots, fought for during the wars of religion, and lost when it fell victim to the idea that individuals count for nothing and that their autonomy is to be submitted to the destiny of the masses and the States, taken as independent moral subjects.

We have an obligation to teach, spread, defend and sanction the principles of freedom, tolerance, respect and solidarity, which are the best antidote against any sort of discrimination. We have an obligation to fight for and against — to fight for those rules and ideals of liberty and democracy underlying an Assembly such as this and the Charter of the United Nations, and to fight against those who deny them.

Finally, we have an obligation to admit that anti-Semitism is still with us. Today, it also feeds on such insidious distinctions as are often made between Israel and the Jewish State, Israel and its Governments, Zionism and Semitism. Or it crops up when the struggle for life led by the Israelis is labelled "State terrorism".

All this leads us to a disturbing question. Can the Holocaust happen again? Rationally speaking, it cannot. European totalitarianisms have given way to democracy; our societies and citizens enjoy unprecedented levels of freedom; civil rights are guaranteed by our constitutions and covenants. However, we must be alert to the new risks.

Being Italian, I place emphasis on Europe and the West. While our civilization grows in terms of economic prosperity and social justice, it has shown itself to be tardy and weak in addressing the emerging threats posed by the resurgence of religious conflicts and international terrorism based on fundamentalism and fanaticism. Today's Europe feels a sense of moral stress and is suffering from a crisis of identity. It is affected by relativism, nihilism, multiculturalism, pacifism, anti-globalism.

Thus, we should not be surprised that, in a recent European poll, 60 per cent of the respondents put Israel — next to the United States — among the countries posing the greatest threat to world peace, or that Europe has not been able to make reference to its Judeo-Christian roots in its Constitutional Treaty.

This is a deplorable state of affairs. It is also a risky one, because if we lose faith in our origins and distort our identity; if we believe that our core values are no better than others; if we start thinking that the cost of defending them is too high; or if we give in to blackmail or fear, then we have no more instruments to counter the anti-Jewish racism that continues to poison us than we have to counter the fundamentalist and terrorist racism that puts peaceful coexistence at risk. On the contrary, if we agree on fundamental human rights, as enshrined in many international Charters; if we use them as a standard all cultures and civilizations should respect; if we stand up to tyrants and make their lives hard, then we shall not suffer those atrocities ever again and we will not face similar ones.

Much has been done. In Italy, we have passed bills against anti-Semitism and racism; we have taken resolutions in Parliament; we have a national Shoah commemoration day, which we observe every year in our institutions and schools. We are doing a lot of things, but more — much more — needs to be done, because the challenge is serious and the stakes are high.

Sixty years ago, when Auschwitz and other Nazi camps were opened, Europe and the whole civil world realized that they had turned their eyes away and felt guilty because they had not been far-sighted enough, had not taken courage at the right moment, had not acted in the proper way. Today, we must do exactly the reverse. It is up to us. If we want to, we can make it.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on His Excellency Mr. Joschka Fischer, Deputy Federal Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany.

Mr. Fischer (Germany) (*spoke in German; English text provided by the delegation*): The name of the Auschwitz extermination camp stands for the Shoah, the ultimate crime against humanity in the twentieth century.

On 24 January 1945, 60 years ago to the day, German SS henchmen in Auschwitz were furiously trying to remove all traces of their millions of murders. Files were burned, gas chambers blown up, incinerators dismantled. Countless exhausted prisoners were hounded together for a death march westward that

many were not to survive. The Soviet troops who reached the camp on 27 January 1945 thwarted the Nazi regime's attempt to conceal the Shoah, that unspeakable crime against humanity, from the eyes of the world.

The liberation of Auschwitz was not a time of joy or triumph because it came too late for almost all those who had been deported there. The Soviet soldiers found just over 7,000 survivors. Only a few were able to escape that hell on Earth. Their relief at their liberation mingled with the sure knowledge of the dreadful fate suffered by the countless who could no longer be saved.

Primo Levi, one of the survivors, described the unease of the soldiers when they reached the scene of horror:

> "They did not greet us, nor did they smile; they seemed oppressed not only by compassion but by a confused restraint which sealed their lips and bound their eyes to the funereal scene."

The American and British troops advancing to Germany from the West were also confronted with dreadful crimes in the concentration camps they liberated. Samuel Pisar survived Majdanek, Auschwitz and Dachau, where he was freed by United States troops. He recently gave a moving account of his experiences in the Washington Post.

Millions had fallen victim to the monstrous mass murder planned in cold blood by the Nazis: Jews first and foremost, but also Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, the handicapped, prisoners of war, dissidents and many others from all across Europe. In Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek and other concentration and extermination camps, it was at German command and at German hands that they were barbarically tortured, brutally murdered through forced labour or pseudo-medical experiments, executed and gassed.

Even today, 60 years after the cataclysm, it is difficult to find words for the suffering, the pain and the humiliation of the victims. Today, we pay humble tribute to all victims of the National Socialist regime of terror and we bow our heads in deep mourning.

Auschwitz was the most horrific expression of a system blinded by racial insanity. Nazi Germany's racist ideology also led it to a heinous war of annihilation against Poland and the Soviet Union, which brought untold suffering upon the people there. Auschwitz will forever be engraved in the history of humankind as a symbol of utter contempt for humanity and of genocide, and it will especially be engraved in the history and the memory of my people as such a symbol. Auschwitz also embodied the horrendous Nazi plan to completely wipe out German and European Jewry with the help of an industrialized extermination apparatus. It cost 6 million Jews — men, women and children — their lives.

Elie Wiesel once described the murdering of Jewish children, the destruction of the future, as the worst crime:

> "They were always the first to be taken and sent off to death. If I were to begin reciting their names, the Moischeles, the Jankeles, the Sodeles, here and now, I would have to stand here for months and years."

This barbaric crime will always be part of German history. For my country, it signifies an absolute moral abomination, a denial of all things civilized without precedent or parallel. The new, democratic Germany has drawn its conclusions. The historic and moral responsibility for Auschwitz has left an indelible mark on us. In 1949, democratic Germany made the inviolability of human dignity the linchpin of its Constitution. We read in Article 1 of the Basic Law:

> "Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all State authority."

It is that responsibility for the Shoah that entails a particular obligation for Germany towards the State of Israel. Former Federal President Johannes Rau asked the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, for forgiveness for the untold suffering inflicted on Jewry by German hands. He did so "for myself and my generation, for the sake of our children and children's children, whose future I would like to see at the side of the children of Israel".

For us, German-Israeli relations will always have a very special character. The State of Israel's right to exist and the security of its citizens will forever remain non-negotiable fixtures of German foreign policy. On that Israel can always rely.

This year, we are celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany. The fact that Israel sees

us as a reliable partner today is by no means to be taken for granted and fills us with profound gratitude.

Our past makes it our duty to banish and combat all forms of anti-Semitism, but also racism, xenophobia and intolerance. Therefore, we must not sit idly by while people are insulted, attacked or injured because of their faith. We must not turn a blind eye while synagogues are vandalized or defiled. And we must not remain silent in the face of pernicious anti-Semitic propaganda. We have to counter the threat of anti-Semitism with the utmost determination and the full force of the law.

After all, the answer to the question of whether Jewish citizens and their communities feel safe and at home in our countries is a crucial indicator of the state of our democracy. Especially in my country, we must ask it every day anew and give a positive response.

Confidence-building and reconciliation by moving together and cooperating closely are also Europe's response to the horrors of the Shoah and the Second World War. It is therefore particularly important for us that, since May 2004, we have been partners with our eastern neighbours, and above all with Poland, in the European Union, which is growing ever closer together.

It was 60 years ago, in the aftermath of the heinous crimes of National Socialism, that the United Nations was founded. That is why we have come together here today at United Nations Headquarters to commemorate the victims of the genocide against European Jewry perpetrated by the Nazis.

Not least because of the dreadful experience of the war and the Nazi tyranny, the founding Members of the United Nations placed the commitment to fundamental human rights and to the dignity and worth of the human person at the start of the Preamble of the United Nations Charter. Preventing genocide, the resounding "never again", is a central raison d'être of the United Nations.

Precisely because genocide never happens entirely without warning, we have to work on combating its harbingers. We have to resolutely counter war, civil war and the abuse of human rights, as well as totalitarian thinking, hate propaganda and the glorification of violence. That is our duty.

To do so, we need effective multilateral cooperation. The United Nations is uniquely suited to and legitimized for genocide prevention. That is my firm conviction. After all, no other organization has so much experience of conflict prevention and the protection of human rights. Further strengthening the world Organization in that field is thus one of the priorities of German foreign policy. Our history makes it incumbent upon us.

Sixty years after the liberation of the concentration camps, the community of survivors is getting smaller by the day. No archive, film or history book can portray their painful experiences as effectively as their personal accounts. We who can listen to the survivors bear a responsibility to recount their story to future generations.

If we are to live together in peace and mutual respect, we must never forget the barbarity of which humankind is capable. After all, as former Federal President Richard von Weizsacker put it in his speech on 8 May 1985,

> "Anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present. Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection."

The very fact that the Shoah could happen in the twentieth century at the heart of Europe and at the hands of Germans has to be a constant reminder that an enlightened, tolerant and open society is not to be taken for granted. We have to work every day to ensure that it remains vibrant. The memory of those who were murdered and the pain of the survivors of the National Socialist extermination camps commit us to that shared goal. We must aspire to it together.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Michel Barnier, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France.

Mr. Barnier (France) (*spoke in French*): Sixty years ago, as the Allies closed in on the territories of the Reich, the horrors of the fighting were compounded by the ghastly discovery of the camps. In his statement on Belsen, Brian Urquhart made us see it most vividly. All those like him, whose eyes met at that time the feverish gaze of the survivors, who found the piles of emaciated corpses, who witnessed the heart-rending last breath of those for whom liberation came too late, were marked for life by the unimaginable and unspeakable.

From its first days in power in 1933 onwards, the Nazi regime built a cruel and implacable system of repression. As more and more of Europe succumbed to

Hitler's machine, the list of the places of suffering grew longer: Belzec: 600,000 dead; Sobibor: 250,000; Majdanek, about which Mr. Geremek spoke earlier: 230,000; Treblinka: 800,000; Auschwitz: more than a million.

In those places of death, the first victims were Germans: political opponents, trade unionists and intellectuals. Jews, pursued with particular hatred, were subjected to special treatment from the outset, with the designation "return undesirable". Ninety per cent of German Jews perished. The Nazis crushed all resistance: the sick and the disabled, who tainted "German blood", the Roma and homosexuals, whom they sterilized by the thousands. Women, children and the elderly were consumed by the monstrous fire.

With the occupation of Europe, barbarity found an even broader field. The Jews who had fled Germany and those from the nations in thrall were hunted down, interned and sent to their deaths, often with the collaboration of a part of the State apparatus of many of those countries.

That was the case in France where, as, President Chirac solemnly said in his speech at the Vel d'Hiv in July 1995, "the occupier was assisted in his criminal folly by French people and the French State". In reaction to that betrayal, answering the call of Charles de Gaulle, the Resistance rose up, while, guessing the fate that awaited the deportees, exemplary citizens — "the Just" — hid and saved thousands of Jews. Hounded themselves, those soldiers of the shadows and those anonymous heroes were in their turn loaded onto the trains of "night and fog", if they had not already died under torture or before the firing squad.

The Nazi enterprise sought the negation of humanity. The "inferior race" was destined to vanish. The Jews, above all, crystallized the obsession with extermination. To the horror of systematized barbarity, the Nazis added genocide with the "Final Solution". As well as ending the most extreme suffering, the liberation of the camps restored to the deportees, both the dead and the living, their identity, and their dignity as human beings.

Our United Nations was born out of a war unlike any other, unprecedented in its geographical scope and its terrifying toll of 55 million lives — mostly civilian — but also in terms of the unique nature of the genocide. But the nations, united against that barbarity, were victorious. By creating an international Organization founded on law, they pledged to spare the world another such cataclysm.

Among the hopes that have been realized, and among the promises that have been kept, I wish to mention first the tremendous advances that have been made in the area of international law: the conditions for the legitimate use of force have been set, and human rights are recognized by a Universal Declaration. Symbolically, the individual who largely inspired that text, René Cassin, Nobel Peace Laureate, was a Jew, a severely wounded First World War veteran and a resistance member from the outset.

The exemplary democracy to which Mr. Joschka Fischer has referred and that was established immediately following the war in the Federal Republic of Germany is a second reason to be heartened, following the monstrous aberration of a regime that held in contempt everything that that great European culture had contributed to the world. A shattered Europe was able to embark on the path to unity, that is, to peace. That promise of peace has been kept without fail since 1950. Progress along that path is continuing today.

Lastly, the Jewish people, whom the Nazis attempted to eliminate, were able, by a decision of the Assembly and thanks to the courage and strength of the pioneers that founded it, to establish their refuge — their State — in the land of Israel.

But over 60 years, how many broken promises have there been throughout the world? How many dishonoured commitments? How many women, children and men have been slaughtered in Cambodia, in Rwanda, in the Balkans and elsewhere? How many rights have been trampled underfoot?

May this commemoration remind us of the pledge that each and every one of our States made as it joined this Organization and adhered to the principles of its Charter:

> "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ... to reaffirm faith in ... the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women ... to ensure, by ... the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest".

France, along with all its European partners, vigorously supported the idea of convening this special session, which does credit to the Assembly. For the

liberation of the camps is the liberation of all humankind; and it behoves all humankind to remember this and to remain vigilant. That is what we are doing here today, and that is what we will do in large numbers at Auschwitz on Thursday.

All the same, humankind must remain vigilant. Vigilance is the duty handed down to us by the memory of the multitude abandoned to the methodical savagery of the Nazis. We must be vigilant and intransigent vis-à-vis all those who still dare to deny the crime, vigilant and implacably intransigent against anti-Semitism and against all forms of racism.

I should like to conclude by quoting a German pastor who was deported for seven years by other Germans. In a few lines of verse, Martin Niemöller reminds us where totalitarianism can lead. He wrote:

> "First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Catholic. Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak out for me."

Let us never forget. When the first signs of persecution of the Jews, to which Professor Wiesel referred earlier — when those first signs appeared that were a harbinger of the Shoah, how many then stood up? How many spoke out? The duty to remember unites us today. It commits us to vigilance, but, above all, it commits us to action.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, His Excellency Mr. Pierre Stewart Pettigrew.

Mr. Pettigrew (Canada): It is a moment of great sorrow that brings us here today to speak to the representatives of the world in this great General Assembly. For this is a solemn occasion that is etched in sadness for my Government and for all my fellow Canadian citizens.

For, truth be told, we should not be here today. In a perfect world, we would not be marking the murder of 6 million people. But this is not a perfect world. Sixty years ago today, our parents discovered that, in anguish.

In a few days, we will stand at Auschwitz and mark the liberation of the survivors of the Nazi horror. Those who survived the Holocaust have aged, and they are fewer now, as time has taken its toll. But we do not forget them, nor do we forget those who did not survive, and we never will.

We are here to give resonance and strength to the notion that we must always remember this dark chapter in our history, for it is a chapter in our collective history as human beings that must never be repeated.

We in Canada take pride in our fight against fascism and in our assistance in liberating those who suffered. We are proud of the contribution that the Jewish community, including survivors of the Holocaust, has made to make Canada stronger, more prosperous and more diverse, and Canadians more respectful of one another.

But if the liberation of Auschwitz marked the beginning of the end of the Holocaust, it did not mark the end of the evil that spawned it. For today, even in societies like Canada, where respect for others is a value, the world, as a society, is facing new threats of hatred that we must see as challenges to our values. More than ever, we reaffirm our common values of inclusion, and we must firmly reject all forms of hatred.

It remains one of the greatest crimes in the history of humanity: the cold-blooded and systematic murder of millions of people, an overwhelming majority of them Jews. A famous American writer once said: "History never looks like history when you are living through it. It always looks confusing and messy and it always feels uncomfortable". My friends, we must never find comfort, we must never forget.

And yet, how did it happen? It happened, in my mind, because the greatest evil is indifference. It is the breeding ground for fear and intolerance. In the present day, we like to think of evil as painted in stark and well-defined colours. But evil can also be mundane, pernicious — almost innocuous. For, as Edmund Burke wrote, all that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing.

(*spoke in French*)

Moreover, it is our ability to recognize evil and to battle our own indifference in the face of hatred directed at others that requires the greatest courage and the greatest insight. Sad to say, we as a civilization are continuing to fail on both accounts. Since the liberation

of Auschwitz, the world has witnessed many atrocities committed against our fellow human beings, such as those in Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Darfur ... and the list of tragedies perpetrated in indifference goes on.

The notion of collective security necessarily implies that of collective responsibility. But nothing can excuse indifference to hate crimes. That is why we advocated the creation of an International Criminal Court and the adoption of legal instruments such as the conventions against genocide. It is also why the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Paul Martin, proposed here in the General Assembly last September, from this rostrum, the concept of the responsibility to protect. States must protect their populations. Rejection of indifference lies at the very heart of that principle, and it is also one of the founding principles of the Organization.

Last year the Secretary-General stated:

> "The name 'United Nations' was coined to describe the alliance fighting to end that barbarous regime, and our Organization came into being when the world had just learnt the full horror of the concentration and extermination camps. It is therefore rightly said that the United Nations emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust. And a human rights agenda that fails to address anti-Semitism denies its own history."

To change the course of history, to ensure that the rights of all are respected, to protect the weak and restrain the strong, we must, first and foremost, fight the very human tendency to do nothing when confronted by evil as long as it is happening to someone else. That will be possible only if we unite our efforts and break the bonds of our own indifference.

In an interconnected world such as ours, we can see and hear instantaneously what is happening everywhere else on the planet. Given those circumstances, the expression "There is nothing new under the sun" is not uncommon. However, no one can apply that phrase to crimes such as the Holocaust. Crimes so horrible and repugnant will live forever in infamy. They remind us that no one can remain indifferent to intolerance and evil.

(*spoke in English*)

I am confident that we can meet the expectations of those who came before us and that we can make the world a more secure, more prosperous, more generous and more respectful place. In this year of commemoration, we must find inspiration in our past and discover opportunity in our collective future.

This commemoration is an occasion of solemnity, but not one of acceptance or indifference. Instead, we must renew our determination to build a better world and a greater United Nations. Remembering The Reverend Martin Niemoller — just quoted by the French Foreign Minister, Michel Barnier — and the 6 million who died, let us join together with loud voices to speak out against hatred and indifference: "Never again! Never again!"

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia, His Excellency Mr. Vartan Oskanian.

Mr. Oskanian (Armenia): On behalf of the people and the Government of Armenia, and on my own behalf, as a descendant of genocide survivors, I am compelled to be here today to join other survivors and descendants of both perpetrators and victims to take part in this commemoration. I am also duty-bound to urge us all to confront more effectively the threat of genocide everywhere, at all times, regardless of the cost and the political discomfort.

The liberation of Auschwitz is indeed cause for commemorative celebration. But as we take part in that commemorative celebration, every time we utter the name "Auschwitz", we are forced to reflect: to look back, to look around and to look deep within ourselves.

After 11 September 2001, reflecting on the unusually high number of victims claimed by that singular event, a journalist wrote, "We are all Americans". Sympathy, solidarity, anxiety and indignation bound us all together. But how much deeper and stronger are our feelings about Auschwitz and the singularity of its horror, its synonymousness with the technology of death and its eerily ordinary commitment to efficiency, to effective organization.

After Auschwitz, we are all Jews; we are all Gypsies; we are all unfit, deviant and undesirable to someone somewhere. After Auschwitz, the conscience of man cannot remain the same. Man's inhumanity to men, to women, to children, to the elderly is no longer a concept in search of a name, an image, a description. Auschwitz lends its malefic aura to all the Auschwitzes

of history — our collective history, both before and after Auschwitz.

In the twentieth century alone, there were 15 genocides, whose victims have their own names for places of infamy. What the French call *les lieux infâmes de mémoire* are everywhere. They are places of horror, slaughter, massacre and indiscriminate killing of all those who have been part of a society, a group, a race or a religion. For Armenians, the desert of Deir-El-Zor is such a place; for Cambodians, it is the killing fields; for the children of the twenty-first century, it is Darfur; for the Jews, the Poles and the rest of us who grew up after the Second World War, it is Auschwitz.

Just as we were, are or might be victims, we all were, are or might be guilty. It is only through the engagement of those who have seen and done the unimaginable and who have the courage, dignity and grace to acknowledge their mistakes and wrongdoing that we can achieve the requisite collective political will and express that will.

That is not so naïve, unrealistic or unpragmatic as it may sound or as some would like to portray it, perhaps to dismiss it. Genocide has nothing to do with individuals who act in an insane manner, commit crimes, carry out evil acts or cause irreparable harm; genocide is the act of a State whose function requires it to act through its organization and structure. Thus, this is not a plea to reform human beings; this is an appeal to take conscious account of the role that our national and international institutions must play in order to ensure that no one will even consider enjoying impunity.

After Auschwitz, one might think that no one had the right to turn a blind eye, or a deaf ear, to what was happening. As an Armenian, I know that a blind eye, a deaf ear and a muted tongue perpetuate the wound. It is a memory of suffering unrelieved by strong condemnation and unequivocal recognition. The world has not spoken, and we need to do so. The catharsis that the victims deserve and that societies require in order to heal and move forward obliges us here in the international community at the United Nations to call things by their names, to bear witness and remove the veil of obfuscation, double standards and political expediency.

Following the disaster caused by the tsunami, we now painfully face a dilemma. On the one hand, the multilateral international response has been very swift, very generous and without any discrimination. However, if we compare and contrast it with the other tragedy, in Africa, it becomes clear to all of us that with regard to Darfur, beyond general condemnation, nothing has been done to pursue the perpetrators and punish them. Of course, the difference in the case of the tsunami is that there were no perpetrators. No one wielded the sword, pulled the trigger or pushed the button that released the gas.

To recognize the victims of genocide and to acknowledge them is also to recognize that there are perpetrators. But this is absolutely not the same as naming those perpetrators, shaming them, dissuading or warning them, isolating and punishing them. If these statements and observations signal a certain naivety that overlooks the enduring structures of politics and interests, then, on this occasion, when we have gathered to commemorate such a horrible event, allow me this one question: if not here and now, then where and when?

George Santayana — who has already been quoted here, but allow me to repeat it — admonished us to remember the past or be condemned to repeat it. This admonition has significance for me personally, because the destruction of my people, whose fate in some way impinged upon the fate of the Jewish people, should have been seen in a broader context as a warning of things to come. The Jews and the Armenians are linked forever by Hitler: "Who speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" he said, just two days before entering Poland.

This cynical mention of Armenians is prominently displayed in the Holocaust Memorial in Washington because it is a profound statement about the role that third parties can play in genocide prevention and remembrance. Genocide is the manifestation of a break in the covenant that Governments have with their people. During genocide, there is nothing left between them but the critical role that third parties can play. We are here today because the Soviet army marched on Auschwitz 60 years ago. I am here today because the Arabs provided sanctuary to Armenian deportees 90 years ago. Third parties can indeed play a role and make the difference between life and death. Their rejection of the policies and behaviour that are not in the interest of any national entity, let alone the international interest of our humanity, is a strong and powerful statement that needs to be made.

However, while neighbours and well-wishers can help with prevention and remembrance, they cannot do much to help the parties to transcend and reconcile. The parties must do that. First, the victims must have the courage and the dignity to move forward. Then the perpetrators must summon the deep forces of humanity and goodness and must overcome the memory of the inner evil that has already prevailed and reject, deny or desist from the deeds done, the intent, the consequences, the architects and executors.

Auschwitz signifies the worst expression of hate, indifference and dehumanization. Remembrance of Auschwitz here today, and its abhorrent purpose, is a vital step to make real the phrase, "Never again".

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Ilinka Mitreva, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mrs. Mitreva (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): On this day full of emotions, a day when, with pain in our hearts, we remember the horrors caused by Nazi doctrine, a day when the world remembers and commemorates the victims of the concentration camps, let me begin by reaffirming the support of the Republic of Macedonia for the convening of this highly significant special session of the General Assembly.

What will the collective memory of the Holocaust be in the twenty-first century, after the last survivors have given testimony? The international community, all of us, and future generations must never forget the unspeakable crimes committed against 6 million Jews and many others during the Second World War. The Holocaust was a dark example of a policy based on religious and ethnic exclusion in total disrespect for the sanctities of human civilization, a blindness that resulted in the deaths of millions of innocent people for being different.

Therefore, commemorating the Holocaust victims is our moral obligation committing us to prevent such horrors from ever happening again. Today is a day of remembrance and reflection, a day for all of us to pay tribute to all those who stood against such a policy and sacrificed their lives for liberty. Today is a day to remember the survivors, who have conveyed their horrible experiences to us and implanted them in our collective memory, thus sending a strong message for future generations. The survivors remember their liberators, coming from different parts of the world, who are never to be forgotten.

The Republic of Macedonia and its historically multi-ethnic society suffered an enormous loss — the almost complete eradication of its Jewish population in the death camps during the Second World War. Although Macedonians did everything in their power to protect Jewish neighbours, sometimes at the cost of their own lives, in 1943, 7,200 people — making up 98 per cent of Macedonian Jews — were deported by the occupying Nazi forces to the Treblinka camp and murdered.

Macedonia remembers its Holocaust victims and fosters remembrance by undertaking various activities. One of these is the opening of a memorial centre for Holocaust victims, the construction of which is to start this year. On 11 March every year, the Macedonian nation commemorates the day when Macedonian Jews looked back for the last time at their homeland while being forced onto the death trains.

We ask ourselves whether humanity has drawn a lesson from history. We must continue asking ourselves that question every day. We established the United Nations as a response to the fears resulting from the Second World War — the war that brought untold sorrow to mankind. We have established the principle of international responsibility for the protection of human rights; we have set conditions for peace, security and justice. We are committed to practising tolerance and mutual understanding and to respecting differences. But, unfortunately, sad examples still exist of new forms of genocide.

We have to admit that a timely reaction has been lacking on the part of the international community. We did establish courts to administer justice for the atrocities committed, but was that really enough, and was it the only appropriate reaction?

This solemn special session, therefore, should not only be a session of commemoration and reflection. It is expected to give more impetus to the streamlining of United Nations mechanisms for exercising responsible multilateralism, for reacting quickly, efficiently and appropriately to all future possible cases of genocide and massive human rights violations.

The commemoration must encourage us to reaffirm, once again, our strong commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We must continuously defend the values that we all agreed on. That will be the best way to honour the memory of the victims of the Second World War and to pay tribute to

those who fought for peace, freedom, democracy and human dignity.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Lord Janner of Braunstone, Queen's Counsel of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Lord Janner (United Kingdom): The Nazis murdered my entire family in Lithuania and in Latvia — every one of them. My immediate family was fortunate that we were British and lived in Britain, and I am now very fortunate and proud to stand here today representing the British Government, the British Parliament and the British nation, which at one time stood alone against the Nazis.

In 1946, I was a national serviceman in the British Army of the Rhine. At the second anniversary of the liberation by the British Army of the Belsen concentration camp, I attended the ceremony, by the mass graves, and felt for the first time the true horrors of the Nazi killing machine. I soon became the youngest war crimes investigator in the British Army of the Rhine. So I know that today, whatever our nationality, we must all do everything in our power to ensure that the next generation learns these lessons — learns the lessons of the Holocaust, learns from the history of the Holocaust, and does everything in its power to fight genocide, whenever and wherever it appears.

Today, we commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, the deepest and most revolting symbol of Nazi evil. Today, as the Secretary-General has so eloquently said, we remember all of those who were murdered: the Jews, yes, and the Roma; the physically and the mentally disabled; the gays; the political prisoners; and the prisoners of war — the millions of human beings murdered by the Nazis, yes, in Auschwitz, and yes, in Belsen, and yes, in dozens of terrible concentration camps liberated by Allied Forces. But we also remember those like my family, who were slaughtered in their towns and villages, in their homes and in their places of worship.

The Nazis sought to exterminate people — men and women, children and babies — whom they regarded as inferior. They exterminated millions, but their evil did not stop with those who were murdered. They embedded in tragedy the scarred lives of survivors and of their families. It took many painful years for the international community to recognize that we must never allow future generations to forget. So our first challenge today is to do all in our power to ensure that the victims and their families are honourably and permanently remembered. Many nations now work effectively together to achieve this remembrance.

In 1998, Britain and other lands established the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. This Task Force now includes 20 member countries. All support the Declaration of the 2000 Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. All of us work together to establish national programmes to create and develop Holocaust education, remembrance and research. Countries with little tradition of commemorating the Holocaust have drawn on the experience of Britain and many other lands in raising public awareness of these tragedies.

The Holocaust was a crime unknown to mankind — it had no name. Today, the word embodies the vision of murders and mass graves, and of the Nazis' grim efforts to wipe out people whom they despised. The 1951 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide established a legal base to ensure that the most horrendous of crimes should no longer go unpunished. We said, "Never again". Tragically, however, the world still suffers from the evils of genocide and ethnic cleansing. The international community has not learned enough from the Holocaust. So the United Kingdom fully supports and salutes the aims of today's special session.

The Nazi war crimes were killings, and the killings were war crimes — heinous crimes of war and unique in humanity. In 1991, the British Parliament passed the War Crimes Act. British schools include Holocaust education in their curricula.

In Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, the British Government, together with the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Governments of the Baltic countries, have developed a project to access, map and signpost literally hundreds of Holocaust mass graves. Those graves contain the bones and the bodies of victims whom the Nazis and their local allies dragged from their homes and massacred without mercy and buried in bits. If we had not done this job, those remains and graves would have gone into history in the forests of those lands.

In Britain, as in other nations, Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January, Thursday of this week,

marks the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. It has become a key national event. It serves two purposes: first, to remember those that suffered and died in the tragedy of the Holocaust. Secondly, we reflect on the lessons to be learned; we remember other human tragedies and intolerance. Non-governmental organizations, together with teachers and educators, have been our most active and effective participants.

From here, I shall return to the United Kingdom and move on to Auschwitz on Thursday. On Thursday, I shall join survivors. I shall join our Foreign Secretary and other leaders, members of the royal family, political mourners and survivors in that most awful, bleak place. Also on that day, our Queen and our Prime Minister will join survivors and their families in a solemn commemoration in Parliament's Westminster Hall. We will all remember the past for the sake of the future.

The United Kingdom fully supports and honours the aims of this special session of the General Assembly. We must not forget the lessons of the Nazi concentration camps. We must not forget the tragic fate of the millions that suffered and who died at the blood-soaked hands of the Nazis. No, we must never forget, never, never, ever.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.